Two Noble Women

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TWO NOBLE WOMEN.

BY

SUSAN PARKMAN.

" Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."
" I have given you an example."

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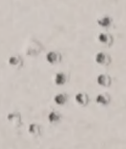

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TWO NOBLE WOMEN.

CHAPTER I.

JIM BURRIS' STORY.

"YES," said he, whittling a fresh chip off the stick in his hand and putting it into his mouth to chew, "yes, I 've had experience. I 've nussed most everything, clear down to small-pox."

He was a tinner who had just straightened up a gutter which a branch torn off by the wind had twisted in its fall. His little charcoal furnace with its simple kit of tools suggested to my thrifty mind several leaky vessels needing only a drop of solder to make them good as new. So I brought them out, and he repaired them by the kitchen door. My little boy came running home from school, and in his haste

to see the soldering iron work he tripped and fell and cut his face quite badly on a scrap of tin.

Before I could run down the steps the tinner had him in his arms; he took him to the pump and washed away the blood, and when I brought the court-plaster he laid the ragged edges of the skin together and applied the court-plaster as neatly as any doctor could.

"You 've had experience," said I, when the wound was dressed.

"Oh, yes, I 've nussed most everything, clear down to small-pox."

"Sit down a while," said I; "it is my treat. You might as well rest a few minutes and I 'll pay for it, and you tell me how you nursed the small-pox."

He sat down like a gentleman, and taking off his battered hat he showed his forehead covered with deep, red pock-marks.

"Do you see them pits?" he asked. "Well, I kin prove I nussed the small-pox, fer I tuck it from the feller that I nussed. He were a poor feller, and we worked at the same bench; and when he tuck the small-pox it looked pretty rough for him, I tell you. He had n't any home, and it was n't no use to take him to his boarding-house, fer he 'd 'a' been pitched out a heap quicker 'n he got there. So I thinks, says I, 'Jim Burris, ef you was in that feller's fix, what 'd you like fer him to do?' And I says, says I, "I 'd like mighty well to have good care.' So I just put fer home to see my old woman; and I says, says I, 'Nancy, if I was tuck with small-pox, what 'd you do?' And she says, says she, 'I 'd take the very best care of you, Jim.' And I says, says I, 'Well, I 'm going to have it 'fore long.' Then I told her about the sick feller, and her and me made our plan in two minutes fer taking care of

him; and I kissed her good-by till I got well, fer I knowed I 'd never dare tech her again after I handled him till we was both all right again.

"Then I went to git him, and she went to work and pulled everything but the bed and two chairs out of the up stairs back room, and sot a ladder ag'in' the shed roof. I helped him up the ladder, and I went up too, and in the winder, and I never once opened the door into the hall till me and him was well again.

"He was able to set up and limp around a little afore I come down, so one or tother of us managed to haul our water and medicines and provender up by a rope out of the winder."

"But how did the wife and children get along all that time?" I asked. "Of course the neighbors would stay away, and she could not go abroad for work."

"Yes, that was all so, but the boys at

the shop, they kep' us going; they every one give ten cents a day, and the boss he done the same; so we felt that we had friends and that done us as much good as the medicine.

"And Nancy never yet faulted me fer it. She got thin and white, I tell you. But every little while she'd come out under the winder and holler up, 'Jim, you're a-doing right, and it'll come out straight.' My wife 's a good woman—she 's one of the praying kind.

"And the feller I nussed, he seemed like he never could do enough fer me or fer her. He lived at our house fer three year, and never a Christmas went over our heads but lots of little corners in the house got filled up. Seemed like he kep' a book of every little thing he heard my wife say she wanted, or the children throwed out hints about.

"And Bill, he seemed like he was per-

fectly contented till he got acquainted with a purty girl, neighbor to us, that clerked in a fancy store. Bill, he thought there never was such a girl, and she was sociable enough with Bill fer quite a while, and then she throwed him over fer a clerk in a dry goods store. Seems like some girls likes a man that 's all the time fixed up like Sunday; and them dry-goods fellers has to be, you know. And then they learn to bow and grin to sell the goods; they have to talk so fine to fine ladies that they git the hang of it, and it do n't take them no time to make a mash on a girl what 's looking out fer style.

"Now a tinner 's different to that, you know. Most of us stands at the bench all day with our leather aperns on, and our ears is nearly split with hammering stove-pipe jints and shaping pans and pails; and if that noise does quit, as like as not there 's some one cussing. If we do go to

a house it's jest to climb to pipe and gutter. Well, a tinner do n't have much chance to play the dude; he can't look reely nice on Sundays, fer you can't git all the black out of your hands, and your nails is always jagged off with the tin. And then me and Bill was all pockmarked, and the dirt settled in them, you know. Look at me now. Would n't call me very handsome, would you? Well, Bill, he was jest so. But there's lots of tinners that read and write of evenings and go to church on Sundays, and they make a good deal better living than them dressed up dry-goods clerks, I tell you.

"But this girl, she had no sense, so Bill he got discouraged. He moped around a while, and then he got to drinking. Him and me, we done a good deal of that before I got married to Nancy, but she got me out of it; and Bill, he seemed like he

had quit fer good when he got well of the small-pox.

"Well, he come home drunk two or three nights, and then Nancy, she said one morning, says she, 'Bill, I never asked a favor of you yit, did I?' And he says, says he, 'No, you never did, but I wisht you would, fer I owe enough to you.' And then she says, says she, 'I 'm going to ask one now. I 've heerd you tell how you used to beat the hull crowd a-playing checkers and dominos, and I 'd like to learn them games, and have the children learn them too. So, if you 'd jest as lief give me my Christmas now and let me choose it, get a set of games and give the first lesson to-night.'

"Well, Bill, he kind of choked up, fer he knowed she never asked that on her own account; but Bill was man enough to take it right, and so he says, says he, 'Of course, I will, Mis' Burris, with the great-

est pleasure.' He got them on the way home from the shop, and after supper him and me cleaned up and we all sot down together, and Bill and Nancy made them checkers hop around, I tell you. The little fellers caught onto the game as soon as anybody, and the way they watched and gave them good advice!

"Then we tried the dominos, and all tuck hands at that. Fust thing we knew it was bedtime, and Bill was sober yit.

"'Nancy,' says I, when we shut our door and heard him pitch his boots across his room, 'I reckon I know what you 're driving at.'

"'Well, Jim,' says she, 'when I fust smelled Bill's breath the other night I thought about the time he tuck the small-pox, and I thought how you chanced your own life to nuss him, and how I never said a word agin' it; and then I thought fer a minute maybe we made a mistake,

and maybe Bill had ought to died that time; he 'd better died of small-pox than of drink. And then I says to myself, says I, 'No, Nancy Burris, wrong do n't come out of right,' and I asked the Lord to show me how to nuss Bill this time. And now one sober evening has passed away. If we kin keep him sober one night at a time, we 'll save poor Billy yit.'

"'That 's so,'" says I. "'I 'll watch him days, and we 'll keep him entertained of evenings between us, fer if he gits a good start with the drink, it 'll take something more than small-pox for the second cure.'

"And I tell you, I was afeared to tell my wife, but the smell of Bill's breath come pretty near upsetting *me*. It was hard work to get a-past ten or fifteen saloons to walk from the shop to my house. The little woman did n't know she was helpin' both of us.

"Well, Nancy, she stuck to it; she got

some other games, but nary a pack of play-cards. You see, her father, he was stabbed while playing fer money, and she 's always said cards might come in at our door, like any other varmint, but they 'd never leave it any way but up the chimbley! And by-and-by she managed to git some books, them paper-covered books named 'Riverside' and 'Franklin Square,' and Bill and me we got to reading, and Bill he read the Bible most of all. And the grass did n't git no chance to grow around our seat in the Methodist church. Fer six good months she kep' something a-going so 's Bill he never tuck an evening out, and the young ones, they never was so happy.

"I said to Nancy, said I, that I guessed she 'd found out the way to manage us all. But Nancy, she always was a clever woman, and a good one too. She 's one of the prayin' kind. Only fer her I 'd 'a'

went to the dogs long years ago. Well, as I said, six months we went on so, and then one day me and Bill we got the job of guttering a building, and the wind was blowing hard and the roof was slick as grease, a mouldy green roof it was, and Bill he slipped and fell.

"We picked him up and carried him home to Nancy. He opened his eyes and looked at me and looked at her, and back at me and back at her. He lifted up one hand and looked at the red pits full of dirt, and he says in a whisper, 'Jim, you saved me when I had the small-pox, and Nancy, you've saved me from going to torment,' and he kind of put up his lips like he wanted us to kiss him. We both kissed him, and then he was gone.

"When he laid in his coffin, Nancy she slipped the six odd checkers more 'n the game required in under his hand and the Bible she laid on his breast in plain sight.

"'Folks would think it was blasphemious,' says she, 'to put them checkers there clost by the Bible, but the Lord knows they helped to save poor Bill from torment.'"

"But what became of the girl?" I asked him, anxious to hear the whole of his story.

"Oh, that fixed-up dry-goods feller lays in jail this day for stealing a silk dress to put on that fool girl's back. And she, well, Nancy give her baby-clothes and things, and Nancy nussed her all the nussing she had. Maybe she will git well, but I think it 's a even chance ef she lives till his cell 's unlocked fer him. Bill, he could 'a' kep' her decent, give her enough to eat, a good plain livin'; but that feller starved her most to death.

"But they a' n't many girls, nor women neither, to stand up by my wife. She 's a clever woman and a praying woman,

and I know she 's saved poor Bill, and I believe she 'll save me yit."

He turned to pick up his irons and furnace, and I thanked him for his story and asked him if I might call on Nancy. Such a bright look swept across his face.

"I know you 'd like my Nancy; she 's a clever woman."

So I wrote down the address, purposing to call and see the woman who had invented a new cure for drunkenness. And "Nancy Burris' Story" I found so touching and absorbing that I wrote it down.

CHAPTER II.

NANCY BURRIS' STORY.

I VERY soon availed myself of the address the tinner gave me and knocked at a clean white door on a quiet back street, the very name of which I had never heard before. A woman opened the door and kindly bade me enter. The room was neat and tasteful; a faded carpet covered the floor, a stand of flowers stood drinking sunshine by the window, a goodly pile of books furnished the mantel, and here, on a little table close by me, was a box of dominos and a checker-board.

I raised the lid while we exchanged some views about the weather, and I answered her kind questions about Johnny's face, and I counted the pieces hastily. Twelve black ones and twelve white

ones—this was the very set of checkermen, and three of each were clasped in that dead pockmarked hand.

She saw the tears that welled up in my eyes and guessed what brought them there. Wiping her own eyes with her apron, she said,

"Jim told me how as he told you about Bill Bullitt the day he straightened up your gutter, so I s'pose you 're thinking about them checkers we buried with him."

"Yes," said I, "I never heard a story that interested me more; and I think, if you will tell me all about it too, I may be able to tell it to some who will be helped by it."

"Why, ef you would," said she, "you 're welcome to it, surely."

"But I want more than that," said I. "Your husband said that you reformed him long ago, and I would like to hear about that too. It is not idle curiosity, I

beg you to believe; I do not pry into my neighbors' business or family affairs; but several of my best friends have loved ones on the road to ruin, and may be you and I can give them a new idea which will help them. And I want to write it down after you tell it. I have written down all your husband said, and I will send it to a good paper, so that thousands of people may be helped by it. I will put in other names, and nobody will recognize you."

Rising, she went to a little cupboard and took therefrom a roll of knitting-work and sat down again. It was a pair of mittens, big gray mittens, "fer Jim to wear a-doing roof-work in cold weather." She knit them in the summers, in twilight hours, and hours when visitors came in and courtesy demanded less absorbing, noisy work than stitching overalls and little breeches on the rattling old machine.

And she apologized for doing even that to-day.

"You must excuse me, but I could not talk about them days when Jim was wild-like without my knitting. I always git so — so kind of worked-up like, when I let myself think long about them days, that I git nervous-like and wring my hands."

"Oh, don't apologize," said I, "for I thought you might be busy, so I brought my work along to keep you company."

Oddly enough, for that warm day, my work was mittens too, blue ones for Johnny, which I was knitting in odd hours, to be ready for the very first cold day.

So we both fell to knitting mittens. We compared our needles and our yarn, we talked a while about a fancy stitch and pattern and how to replace worn-out thumbs and palms, and by and by, when she seemed quite at ease as if we were old

friends, I asked how long she had been married.

"Eleven year this coming winter," said she; "I was eighteen year old the day I married."

I looked at her. Only twenty-nine years old and I was forty! Life has dealt gently with my heart and face, but the face before me had history enough in it for fifty years of life. It was a strong face, full of character and sweetness, but bearing lines of suffering and distress. It was a countenance that comes to victors after a bitter conflict. It had that peaceful look that faces wear after the suffering and the dying, while waiting for the burial.

"Ef you really want to hear about us and will put in other names, I will begin back to the first of it," said she, after a moment's musing.

"I do, indeed," said I, "and I think it will do good."

"Well, my father, he was a drinking man from the first I kin remember. My poor mother did the best she could to keep us children right and to protect us, but one night he druv us out of doors, and her too, out into the snow. She wrapped us up the best she could, and we saw daylight, all but her and the baby; they was dead when he came to hisself and opened the door to let us in again. He swore off drinking then fer a while, but he got into the way of it again. Well, we all growed up somehow, and father, he got cut over a game of cards he was playing for money. You see, sometimes he won, sometimes he lost. For a long time he won, and we had plenty; then he got to drinking harder, and he lost his sharpness and we was hungry half the time. Then one night he got to fighting, and they brought him home bleeding and dying. Jim, he was a-going by the saloon-door

when father got cut, and he helped them carry him home. He stayed all night and helped me take care of father, and that's how me and him got acquainted. We was married in six months, and in all that time I never smelled liquor in his breath, and I thought Jim was straight.

"It was n't more 'n a month till he come home as drunk as he could walk; he could n't get up the steps. It was a warm night, and I kind of guided him around into the back yard, and he fell down on the grass. I set and held his head in my lap all night. I was afeared to leave him alest the rats would gnaw him, so I held his head, and washed him off when he throwed up. His head ached all next day so he could n't lift it up, but I give him coffee and kep' the room cool and dark, and set by him all day. He said he would n't never drink no more, and he did n't fer a while, but that never

lightened my load of worry ary bit. I 'd seen that tried and said before, but I tried to look like I believed it.

"In six weeks he got at it again, and never come home fer three days and nights. Them days and nights seen a hard fight for me. I could n't see my way clear at first at all. Sometimes I 'd say to myself, 'The best thing you kin do is to light out, right now, before they is a crowd of helpless little children to suffer with you. And you 've seen your mother die before her own door: what 's the use of you being druv out in the snow like she was, when you could make a good living fer yourself now?'

"I did put all my things into my trunk the second day: but just as I was putting on my shawl to go and call an expressman to take my trunk to the dépôt, I heard a step at the front-door, and it sounded just like Jim's.

"I throwed off my shawl and opened the door. It seemed like my love for Jim come up as strong as ever when I heerd that step—but it was n't Jim, only a pedler. I went back and set down on my trunk and cried. Seemed like ef I could leave my body with Jim and forgit where I left it, and go away myself where I 'd have no more worry—never know whether he was drunk or sober—I 'd do it gladly. And then it come to me, all in a flash, that that was just what mother done that cold night; and I says to myself, says I, 'That is a-coming to you, too, some day—eternal life, with nary worry in it; so be patient a little while! You swore to stick to Jim for better or fer worse, and now it 's turned out to be worse do n't break your promise.' So I dried my tears and hung my clothes up in the closet ag'in. And then I tuck my Bible and read everything it says about drunkards. And I

says, says I, 'Dear Lord, I find I am married to a drunkard! Please, Lord, fer mercy's sake, help me to live with him, and show me if there's any way to save him! And please take me up out of it ef it gits too hard!'

"And then I made myself a cup of tea and a plate of toast, and I went to bed and slept as sweet as a baby.

"Jim, he come home next morning. He sneaked in, like he thought I was going to cry or scold; but I jist give him toast and tea, told him all the news I could make up (fer I had n't left my door while he was gone), and nary one of us named him being gone at all."

"The next week he come home drunk ag'in, and I nussed him through it. Then, when he come to himself, he began to cry, and say he had a mind to kill himself—that he 'd better die and leave me alone in peace.

"Then I seen my chance to speak. 'Jim,' says I, 'I married you for better or fer worse; and ef it 's worse, it 's worse. But it might jest as well be better, ef you'll let me help you, and I believe the Lord 'll show me how.'

"I went and got the Bible, and read to him all them verses about drunkards I come acrost; and him and I agreed that drinking did n't 'pear to be a little matter to the Lord, nor yit a matter that a man has ary right to settle for himself.

"'Now, Jim,' says I, 'when do you drink?'

"'Well, Nancy,' says he, 'generally on the way home of evenings, but sometimes on the way to the shop of mornings.'

"'Well now,' says I, 'ef you will let me walk along of you to work, and call by fer you evenings, will that help you to keep straight?'

"Seemed like he thought it would; so

every morning I packed his dinner-pail and slicked myself while he was eating, and walked with him to the shop-door, and carried my dinner-pail, so folks would think I worked somewheres, and then streaked back home another way to eat my breakfast. Then every evening I took my pail and went back the same way I come, and stopped for Jim, and walked home with a sober man.

"He liked it for a while, and then he got contrairy. Some of the men, they got in the way of sending out for beer to take with their noon-lunch, and Jim, he drank it too. Fer he thought ef I come for him he would n't git no chance to git anything stronger, and the beer would n't do no harm. But that little taste of beer jest kep' him restless and thirsty, and he after a while looked cross at me when I come after him, and throwed out hints that ef he was old enough to earn a living for

me he was old enough to walk the streets alone. He 'd quit work before the hour, and let them dock him, jest to give me the slip and git home before me, to let me see he could do without me.

"But every time I was scared jest the same; my heart would beat so hard when I found he 'd gone ahead that it could n't quiet down when I found him safe, so I got almost sick.

"Then I tried going earlier, and tried to be as lively as I could to entertain him. Jim, he always thought so much of a good conundrum; he knowed our old joke-book by heart, so I could n't crap him anywhere in that. So I turned my wits over all day to make up something for him to guess, to pass away the time walking home. One evening the new moon was up a'ready, with a star behind it, and I turned Jim so as he 'd see it over his right shoulder, fer luck, and I says, says I, "Why is a

star like a pie?' He thought and thought for ten squares. He guessed 'they both had crinkled edges,' and 'both was liable to be hot,' and jest as we got to our door he give it up, and said it must be something like 'because neither one can climb a tree;' and I says, says I, 'Well, I 'll put you out of your misery, Jim. A star is like a pie, because it is a pie (*up high*).' That was the only conundrum I made up that lasted him ten squares—for he was a good hand to guess, and knowed the motions of conundrums.

"One day, when I 'd about made up my mind that I 'd have to quit walking them forty squares every day before long, the boss, he come into the shop one noon and told the boys he had a baby at his house and would set up the beer for them. He sent for a bottle apiece; and Jim, he could n't rest, when once he had that down, till he got something else. He borried a

dollar from the boss (fer I kep' all his money fer him, and even bought his backy), and he started off on a run as soon as the six o'clock bell rung.

"I was standing by the lamp-post when he come out, but he got the start of me. I followed him the best I could, but I lost him in the crowd. Then I begun on the saloons. I went in every one, and at two o'clock in the morning I found him lying on the sidewalk, where they'd pitched him out of that big, high-toned saloon on Garber Avenue, where the band plays every night.

"I had my dinner-pail in my hand yet, but his'n had been stole from him, and all the little trinkets from his pockets—even the button from his neck-band and the shoes and stockings from his feet! Well, I filled the pail with water from the hydrant, and set down on the curbstone to bathe his head, fer it was hot as fire.

"My pride says to me, 'Leave him here fer the police; don't let anybody see you sitting in the gutter by a sot!' But I looked up at the sky, and it somehow rested me and made me strong to see the bright stars shining and feel the night so still. And I says to my pride, says I, 'They a'n't no place on earth too good to take care of a man the Saviour died fer; and they a'n't no woman too good to do it, neither. I've married Jim fer worse, and I'll stick to worse till it turns to better!' And I set and bathed his head.

"Pretty soon a policeman come along and looked at me and Jim, and he says, says he, 'I reckon I'm the doctor fer this case.' And I says, says I, 'As fur as gitting the fee is concerned, I kin pay you that, but so fur as the doctoring is concerned, I've taken that contract fer life, and I'm a-going to keep him under my care.' He kind of laughed, and said he

'lowed I'd better move him on before daylight, and passed along.

"It tuck me two good hours to wake Jim up, and then he was so cross! Jim never cursed me till that time, and it made me feel like he had power to curse me; I felt like I was cursed; but that was on 'count of being so faint and weak. He cursed me ef he stumbled, and he cursed me ef I tried to hold him up, and he cursed me fer his shoes and stockings being stole. I bought a little quinine at a near drug-store, and I tuck some and give him some, to brace us both up to walk home. Down Garber Avenue and Chisell Avenue we walked—he went in front and I follered—two good miles to home."

"See here!" said I, "I do believe I saw you. Was it on a Sabbath morning in April?"

"Yes, it was," said she, her pale cheeks flaming suddenly and a shocked look leap-

ing into her eyes. "We did pass by your house on Chisell Avenue. Were you looking out?" "Yes," said I. "I'm sure I saw you; the man was barefooted, and looked as if he had been lying in the mud; and he was swearing at the woman. The woman wore a blue sun-bonnet and blue gingham dress; she was as pale as death, and looked as if she could hardly walk; the tears were running down her cheeks. I prayed for her and for him all day; I could not get them out of my mind. If I had been dressed I would have gone down and spoken to her."

"I wisht I'd knowed it, ma'am; it'd a' helped me mightily that day. I did n't think any of the rich folks would be stirring so early Sunday morning. But I do believe your prayers helped me, fer that day was a turning-point with Jim. My baby was born before night, on the 'count of me walking all night long, and it died

in jest three hours. And Jim, he thought I was a-going to die too, and he stayed with me and nussed me—seemed like he could n't bear fer no one else to tech me nor lift me. And after I 'd got so 's he could set things handy by the bed and leave me, and ever sence till now, he 'd take a little envelope on pay-day and have the boss put his wages in and seal it up; ever sence then he 's brought it home sealed up fer me to keep and manage. I do n't really think Jim has tasted liquor sence."

But I wanted to hear more about the checker-cure and Bill Bullitt.

"He told me how he nursed Bill Bullitt," said I, "and that the small-pox cured Bill of drinking for a while. Were n't you dreadfully frightened about the small-pox? I do n't see how you could consent to its being brought into the house."

"Well, yes," said she, stroking the un-

finished mitten tenderly, "I was afeard of it, as any one would be; but ever sence Jim's worse got turned to better I 've kep' trying to build him up that way. And jest as soon 's he told me what he wanted, I thinks, says I, Jim 's trying to do good, and that 'll help him, and I 'm in for anything that 'll help Jim. I knowed it 'd all come right somehow."

"Were you not afraid you would lose Jim?" I asked.

"Well, now," said she, "do n't you see I could n't lose Jim ef he died good. I 'd have him ag'in after a little while. Death ha' n't the worst thing in this world. I 've seen lots of things worse than death."

"But, then, what would you do when his wages were stopped? You would not be allowed to stir abroad for work, and no one would hire work done in a house where there was small-pox," I continued, trying to sound the depths of this woman's

faith. "Were n't you afraid your children would suffer for food?"

"No, ma'am; workingmen do n't do each other that way. The boys at the shop, they seen what Jim was doing, and they kep' us up. As sure as the day come round the money come to see it through, and things to eat, and medicines and fuel —everything I needed. One day they brought some liquor too; they said the sick men needed it to build them up. But I handed back the bottle to them, and I says, says I, 'Now look a-here, boys, I 'm a thousand times obliged to you fer all your kindness. You have showed yourselves good friends, but you can take back your money and your victuals and your medicines ef this has got to go along with them. I love my husband just enough to see him go up safe to heaven and leave me lonely here. I wont say one word of murmur ef the Lord takes everything I

love, but ef Jim Burris ever gits a smell of liquor in his breath ag'in, I 'll holler murder till I git tuck up.' And they never fetched another drop of it and never even offered beer to Jim at noon ag'in. I was most awful scared when Bill began to drink ag'in, fer I seen plain enough that Jim was gitting restless."

"Why," said I, interrupting her, "he told me that it made him want some too, but that you did not suspect it."

For the first time she laughed and blushed, and made her needles fly at double-quick.

"Oh, I 'm Jim's mind-reader," said she; "he never has a thought that I can't guess at somehow. I knowed the minute I looked at Jim that he and Bill would stand or fall together. So I went to work on Bill, and kep' the evenings busy for them both; Jim said he told you."

"Yes," I said, "he told me all about

the games and books. That was a happy thought of yours."

"It helped," she answered modestly; "and I got a corn-popper too, and Jim, he made a little charcoal furnace that we could set right on the hearth and pop corn any time. I s'pose Jim, he forgot to tell you what a good singer he is. Well, he is a good singer, and him and me takes lots of comfort singing with the children. Bill, he liked it too, but nothing I knows on would 'a' kep' Bill only he was proud to know them games so 's he could learn us how to play them. I never put my mind on anything so hard sence I tried to make up conundrums as I did to learn them games and give Bill something to do to beat me playing.

"Bill was a good feller. I don't see why that girl treated him so. Poor thing, I do n't believe she 'll last long."

"Where does she live?" I asked.

"Oh, right down the alley. I sometimes think I 'll fetch her here; but ef I was to seem like I was much tuck up with her it might wean Jim off from his home. I do n't know what to do."

"Take me to see her," said I. "I have a little money I could spare, and maybe you would take charge of it and have her taken care of where she is."

"Well, now," said she, "ef that do n't beat the Dutch! This very morning I begged the Lord to show me the way to see her through without upsetting Jim, and now He 's sent you here with money in your pocket and good-will in your heart."

The woman showed her character in the way she rolled up all that knitting, laid it upon the shelf, shut up the blinds, and had me on the way to the sick-room in the alley before I could think twice.

CHAPTER III.

SALLIE CARMEL'S STORY.

FOR half a square I followed my thick-shod, sure-footed guide, picking my way among tin cans, broken bottles, and the heaps of garbage wasted by every American family, however scanty be their fare, dreading to feel a sharp edge cutting my thin shoes; and then she half pushed, half knocked upon a door which instantly reeled back upon its only hinge and leaned unsteadily against the wall.

"Sallie, here's the lady Jim soldered fer. She said she was a-coming to see me and she come, and I 've fetched—. Why, Sallie, she 's a nice lady. Wont you see her, Sallie?"

For, after a sharp glance at me, my dress and bonnet, the dark-eyed girl on

the low bed drew up the sheet over her face and began to cry. Evidently she knew me, but the brief glimpse I had had of her face did not suggest any one in particular to me.

After an ineffectual effort to persuade her to uncover her face, Nancy Burris and I began to talk about various little tricks useful to know in raising calves and lambs and babies, and presently Nancy reached across the sobbing form outlined beneath the quilt and lifted out the baby to show it to me.

I took it in my arms; it was a baby with a face—a baby six weeks old, with small, wise countenance and quiet eyes. There was an expression of endurance about the closed mouth quite different from the blessed, silly look of the thrifty child of happy parents.

"This baby looks as if it had suffered," said I.

"Indeed it has, ma'am. I'll wash it now and show you. The doctor says it's 'bursted.'" said this good Samaritan, pouring warm water which she had brought with her from home into a basin, and getting various little things together for the baby's toilet.

"The docter says it's 'bursted,' and you can't buy them little braces little enough fer it now, but when it gits bigger it kin have something bought fer it."

Together we took off the scanty clothing, and I clasped the baby in my arms with a curious thrilling memory of one of my own stout youngsters who began life just so.

"Mrs. Burris," said I, after a little examination, "'you can claim the fee and I'll pay it,' as you said to the policeman, 'but I'll do the doctoring' this time."

"Why, do you think you can help the baby?" she asked, sponging and drying

the little limbs with deftest, gentlest hands.

"I do," said I. "I cured one of my children of a similar injury with two big buttons, a bit of broad whalebone, and three months' steady care. I think I learned my lesson thoroughly enough to venture to practise it now."

Down went the covers from the flushed face on the bed. The mother's heart was asserting itself.

"Mrs. Baldwin, can you help my baby?" she asked eagerly.

I explained to her the nature of the trouble, and the simple, easy cure, and she directed me, with some embarrassment, to look in a certain bureau-drawer where I might find both bones and buttons. There were many things in that drawer—piles of remnants of embroideries and laces, papers of pins and needles, scrap pictures from bolts of muslin, ends of

ribbons, half cards of buttons, odd hair-pins, and the like. Evidently the man in jail was not the only light-fingered member of the family. A little search among these odds and ends disclosed the articles desired, and in a few minutes they were put together and fastened in the baby's band, and the little fellow went to sleep.

During the bandaging and dressing I often glanced at the brown eyes that watched our movements, and at the hands, which somehow had a more familiar look than had the face. Where had I seen those slender, perfect hands? They said she had been a clerk in a fancy store. There used to be a girl in Burk's who had just such hands, but she had golden hair, and this girl's hair was faded brown.

That girl used to pet her hands like babies; nay, they caressed each other as if each admired the other and was jealous lest some other hand should touch it. She

always wore a bit of wide lace falling over her wrists. And when she looked among the boxes for a size or pattern one would have thought that she was blind and had to find the label by the touch.

Just such hands lay on the dark quilt now, a little thinner, but exquisite still. But there seemed to be such a gulf between the jaunty little beauty in Burk's fancy store and this sad-eyed creature in the miserable den, that I waited for her to speak and tell me if she chose.

"You don't know me, Mrs. Baldwin," she said at length, interrupting Nancy's kindly talk.

"I am not sure," said I. "You remind me very much of a young girl in Burk's, but I have not 'shopped' much lately, and have not missed any one from there."

"Well, that 's where I clerked," said she." I 've matched buttons and edgings for you many a time. I sold you that trim-

ming on your skirt." And she leaned down from her low trundle-bed to look at the white scallops which lay on the floor in sight, as the baby had disarranged my dress. "And I have a little piece just like it in that drawer," she continued after a moment's scrutiny with her experienced eyes.

"Well," said I, "only this week I discovered that a few inches of it needed to be replaced; but I have had it so long that it seemed useless to try to match it."

She smiled and begged me to get out the package of wide edgings, and, instantly selecting the exact pattern, she laid it in my hand. The piece was marked "$1\frac{3}{4}$ yards for 60 cents." The original price was seventy-five cents a yard. For a moment I hesitated about acting as a receiver of stolen goods; then I reflected that I had better make my way first into

her confidence and trust that by and by she might be influenced to return this and the rest of the things to their rightful owner. So I thanked her and put it in my pocket, intending never to unfold it for my own use.

But she was watching me intently, and presently she said, in a hesitating way, "Mrs. Baldwin, there is something I 've wanted a chance to ask you. Do you recollect one day you told me I had wonderful quick eyes? And I says I wished they was quick for everything. And you said most folks has sharp eyes for other folks' faults, and I says mine was wonderful quick for that. And you leaned over the counter, and says you, 'My dear, the Lord has given every one of us a pair of eyes to look into ourselves with and to look at him with, and that when these are busy the others have not much to do.' Many a time I 've thought of that and

wondered what you meant by it. Was that out of the Bible-book?"

What a wave of shame rolled over me when I heard that! How many times I had turned over trimmings with her, or measured buttons or matched crewels, and after all these opportunities I had only planted a question in her mind—I, who owned a score of Bibles, big and little, plain and ornamental, Bibles of all the new editions, Bibles that begin with Genesis and end with Revelation, and Bibles that are hardly more than introductions to the concordance, the dictionary, and chronological tables within the same two lids. And this was all that my Bibles and my knowledge of them had done for this poor sinner!

I tried in a broken, stammering way to explain my meaning, and she listened as thirsty travellers listen for the murmur of a far-off brook or the pattering of the rain.

"Oh, I wisht you 'd told me that then!" she cried; "it might have made everything different these last two years."

"I wish I had," I answered, "and if you will let me come to see you often I will try to do my duty to you and to my Saviour. Besides, Mrs. Carmel, you know I have undertaken to cure this baby, so I will have to call and see my little patient."

She cast one quick, pained glance at Nancy Burris, and then, with crimson face and eyes fixed on a bed-post, she began with a trembling voice to tell a sad, old story, a story little differing from some I had heard before, and that enhanced its sadness.

"I do n't expect that neither one of you will ever come near me again," said she, "but I 'm going to tell the truth because I think you can tell me what to do; and if there 's any help for my case in your

Bible-book, and if you 're willing I should have it, I 'd like to have it.

"You called me 'Mrs. Carmel,' and that's the name I go by; but I 'm no 'Mrs.' in the law." Nancy and I met each other's eyes; hers were full of tears and mine were brimming, and the girl went on: "My name is Sallie Fowler, and his name is Henry Clay Cromwell. Us girls got to calling him 'Clay Caramel,' because he always kept his pockets full of cheap caramels and they had a behind-taste of clay. And we kept it up till 'Carmel' come to be his name. Him and I got to going together and kept company for a few weeks. Then one night we was to a party where they was playing games. They took it into their heads to have a mock wedding, and they said me and Clay Carmel was the best looking couple and must stand up, and they 'd save us a fee.

"Well, we 'd had wine two or three

times a'ready and was ready for most any wild sport. So we stood up and tuck a-hold of hands, and one of the boys married us and even said his prayer. Then they all wished us well, and when we started home they threw old shoes after us and laughed and joked us as far as we could hear. And, I do n't know, I b'lieve it kind of seemed to me like I was married. When we got most to Clay's boarding-house he took out his night-key, and says he, 'I consider that you are my wife now, and there 's lots of people gets married without no more fuss than we was. So I 'm going to keep you in my care and take you home with me.' I can't say if I did say anything ag'in' it. I think now it was the wine made my will weak ; like as not they put something in it, though Clay says he never done it nor let it be done.

"In the morning we made it up to tell

that we stopped to a preacher's house on the way home and had the knot tied reg'lar. And Clay, whenever the fellers pushed him fer the preacher's name, would make out like he was dying a-laughing to think how the preacher looked with his hair all over his head and his galluses a-hanging and a nightcap dodging up to the head of the stairs, trying to peek at us without us seeing. And the way he 'd tell it and act it out, they 'd git to laughing and forgit what they was after. But it was n't no laughing matter to me. Time and time I begged Clay to go with me and git married in the law. But he always said that would let it all out and we 'd never hear the last of it; and we must save up money to go to some other town, where we could go and fix it right and none of our set would n't hear of it.

"He did stick to me better than I had any idee of. There is other girls in this

square in the same fix as I 'm in (though they do n't know how it is with me), and their men do n't act like they cared what become of them; they keep them scared all the time threatening to leave them. But even if Clay is good to me it is n't like being married safe and sure. And how do I know if he 'll come back to me when he gits out? I have n't got a scrap of paper to show for it—and here 's my baby."

As I looked at the fair young thing, too sorrowful to cry as she told her story—perhaps past crying any more over anything—I thought of my own boys and girls, invited to parties and tempted with wine. If this child and her lover had not drunk the wine which blunted their untrained consciences and led them into sin which even their scanty ideas of morality would not allow when sober, she might still be petting her hands at Burk' s and

he be selling silks at Swinton's. The universe is too small to hold one such sad heart without a throb of pain from centre to circumference; yet there were others, more than one, in that same square!

"How long must Clay be—away yet?" I asked.

"Why, six months, half a year more!" she answered, with some fire, "and just for taking a little end of silk to make me a basque. The floor-walker always did have a spite ag'n' Clay, and all the clerks know it, and so he was keen after him. Oh, they can see a good deal when they want to, and they can be blind enough too if their pets is concerned."

I could not help thinking that the floor-walker at Burt's must have kept his blind side turned towards this pretty, brown-eyed girl, with her exquisite "light" fingers.

"May I go and see Clay?" I asked.

She turned and looked at me as if she would measure my soul, then snatched my hand and kissed it. "Give Clay that hand when you meet him, and tell him I sent a kiss in it," she said; and the color left her face, and Nancy sprang to get the bottle from the little shelf lest she should faint. We stayed a while, until her pulse beat evenly once more, and left her, promising to return the next day.

"You knowed her by her hands," said Nancy, as we retraced our steps among the refuse to the street. "Poor Bill's hands did n't reely look fit to tech hern, and I will always 'low that 's why she went back on him; but my! Bill 'd never served a woman sech a trick as that: no more 'd Jim; and nary one of them 'd 'a' stole, not fer the queen! But do you reely mean to go to see the man?"

"I do," said I, "and perhaps get his term shortened and see him married to

Sallie, for I believe it is the worry and the shame that keep her down as much as sickness."

"Well," said she, giving my hand a parting grip that split my glove and drove a ring into my fingers, "Jim said, when he come home from soldering your gutter, and told me how he had a talk with you, he says, says he, 'I 've seen a woman you or me could go to in the day of trouble.' And I says, says I, 'That 's a sight I never seen yit, the person I could carry troubles to,' but I 've got a good hold of her hand all the same." And she wrung it till I was glad there were tears already in my eyes, and we separated.

The sun was still high, my tea was all arranged for, my dear mother was at my house for that day to welcome the children home from school, my husband would not leave his office for nearly two hours yet, so I hailed a passing car and soon stood

knocking at the door of the jail. Very easily the door opened to admit Judge Baldwin's wife, and the prisoner I desired to see was brought down to the office.

We recognized each other instantly. More than one dress pattern had those taper fingers measured and folded for me. He wept when I showed him where Sallie had just now kissed my hand.

"Truly, Mrs. Baldwin," said he, "I do mean to do right by Sallie just as soon as I get out. I will do right by her and the baby."

He was the same gentlemanly-looking fellow still, in spite of his striped clothes and his close-cut hair, and it stirred my heart to see him there.

"I have been thinking a good deal since I come here, and I tell you I have respect for Sallie, though I never could make her believe it, and I made up my mind that it was the wine that done the mischief. If

I had n't had it I 'd never tried to lead her astray. And when I do get out I 'll stand by her and the baby."

"What judge sentenced you?" I asked.

"Why, Judge Baldwin sentenced me," said he. "I wondered then if he was any kin to Mrs. Baldwin that used to trade at our store. Is he, now?"

"He is my husband," I answered joyfully, "and the way begins to clear before me now. I think I must see if I cannot 'lay down the law' to him a little."

"He spoke very kind to me, ma'am, when he sentenced me," said the man, "and he said he would gladly do anything for me he could do proper."

"Well, Mr. Cromwell," said I, after a little thought, "I shall have to tell him you are sorry and will never steal again, if I ask him to shorten your term. And I shall have to see your employers, too, and

make it right with them. What shall I say for you?"

"I 'll just tell you the right down truth," the man exclaimed. "I am sorry and I am ashamed, and I would like a chance to prove it. If I could get back behind the silk counter the 'house' would never lose nothing more by me."

"Did you ever take anything else?" I asked, determined to know the worst about this man before I became his ally.

"That 's the most I ever took, ma'am, that remnant of Satin de Lyons. There was some other few little things. Sometimes when I 'd be drawing the covers over the stock a little piece would fall and nobody see it, and I 'd easy slip it in my pocket. Many 's the time I wished I had n't done it since I come here. And then another thing: they is some ladies that never counts up the change, but just stuffs it in their pocket-books, and the

clerks comes to know them for it. Sometimes when one of them kind sent up cash on my ticket and the change come back in a good few pieces, I slipped a dime or a quarter up my sleeve. Them I know I can't pay back, but I 'll never do it again. Mrs. Baldwin, you don't know what a hard life most of the clerks sees. It 's small pay they get, and they have to dress nice and keep a good face on, no matter what goes wrong. I 've knowed a floor-walker to tell a clerk he 'd have to pay for a mistake he 'd made, and it was just the amount of his month's rent. And then, if the feller looked kind o' struck and hurt, he 'd tell him if he could n't put on a better face for customers than that he could pass in his check-book. The tinner and the carpenter or mason, most any other tradesman, they can look as they feel, so long 's they do their work right, and they can stand and cuss their luck the whole day long.

But the salesman has to look pleasant if his heart is breaking and everything on the footstool's going wrong. And the workingmen can save on clothes, too. When they wear out they can wear them patched or ragged if their women a' n't good at mending, and they get better pay when all is told. Me and Sallie had to pinch our stomachs to put on our backs. Many a time we 've dressed ourselves up to go down town, and had to go on cheese and crackers, and little enough of that."

"Why," said I, after a silent calculation, "did you spend everything on dress and the bare necessities of life? Did you spend nothing for amusements?"

His eyes fell before mine and he replied with some confusion, "Well, we had to go to the theatre, you know; it was all that kep' us up. And we had to have candy."

"So one thing you kept back change for was to go to the theatre?" I asked.

"Yes, ma'am, that is the truth," said he. "It seemed like we had to go two or three times a week to keep our minds off of our troubles."

"And there were some extra expenses involved in that," I continued.

"Oh, yes," he answered, "Sallie had to have white gloves and a nice hat to go in, and that cost money too."

"Has what you saw and heard there been a source of comfort to you since you came here?" I asked.

"No, ma'am, it really has n't. It 's more like 'dead' cigar smoke than anything else to think of, and I feel like my whole life has been make-believe, like the plays. And it has been, too," said this man, bent on telling the "whole truth" for once at least. "It has been make-believe, just a perfect farce. Look at the Burrises now.

They have plenty to eat and it's paid for; and they rent the one house from year's end to year's end. They don't put on no style, but I know they take more comfort of life than me and Sallie ever did. Why, we've moved as high as four and six times in one year; pay first month in advance and 'cheek' the landlord till he puts us out, and try it over somewheres else. We a' n't had homes, just roosts. I want to have a good long talk with Sallie whenever I get out, and see if we can't begin again and begin right. Seems like I 'll fly when I think of her lying sick in that old hole, and all she's went through with alone, and me here locked up and can't do nothing. And then, what will I do when I do get out? I get three meals a day here, but who's a-going to give me anything to do after what I've been through? I'm like the feller in the play, I'm 'Marked for Life.'"

"Well," said I, rising to go, "I will talk to my husband about you, and I will attend to Sallie's wants while you are kept away from her. And I want you to kneel down night and morning and ask God to bless and guide me in whatever I try to do for you and her. These days when you are not otherwise employed you can make precious days, the best days of your life, by learning about God and his Son who died for you. You can be getting ready for heaven here as well as anywhere, and the Holy Spirit will abide with you here. It wont be the first time that God and the angels have visited a jail. Have you access to a Bible every day?"

"No, ma'am," said he, "there is no reading here only a song-book, a dream-book, and an old city directory."

Just then four policemen entered bearing between them a screaming, cursing,

clawing woman, half naked and wholly frantic; and I took a hasty leave before they had agreed upon the safest way to loose their hold upon her.

I hastened to the nearest bookstore and bought a Bible; and after laying slips of paper in where the angel opened the doors for Peter, and where Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison, and marking several passages in the Saviour's life, I ordered it to be delivered at the jail for my prisoner and hastened home.

CHAPTER IV.

"IN PRISON, AND YE VISITED ME."

"WHAT is it that thou desirest of me, Queen Rachel? for I perceive that thou art trying to find courage to ask a favor. Behold, it is granted already, be it the half of my kingdom, or the hole in my pocket." Thus spoke my husband, after the youngsters had butted their heads into their pillows for the last time and forgotten to recede for another blow. And he looked at me with cross-examining eyes. They say he never fails to "bare false witness" when once he has caught the liar's eye.

"I want a man out of jail, John," I answered boldly.

"Am I not 'a man out of jail,' and am I not sufficient for thee, oh most gracious

queen?" said he, without taking his keen eyes from my face.

I had to laugh, although the tears had very nearly started first. "Now, John," said I, "this is no laughing matter." And I told him all about the Burrises and Cromwells, or "Caramels." "He wants to try it over and be good," I said in conclusion, "and Sallie needs his care."

"Oh, yes," said he; "'when the devil was in prison, the devil a saint would be; but when the devil got out, the devil a saint was he!'"

"Besides quoting incorrectly, you are mistaken about the man," I exclaimed a little warmly; "he does not even think of being a 'saint,' and he has surely had nothing about him to suggest the idea. Just think, John, the circulating library in that jail consists of a song-book, a dream-book, and an old city directory!"

How he laughed!

"The dream-book certainly suggests the story of Joseph at the period of his life when he was similarly situated," said he. "And a new city directory might be valuable as a sailing-chart for next voyage, to an incarcerated burglar; but to be shut up with an old city directory! They might use it for curl-papers, but they do not wear their hair!" And he laughed till he cried.

"In which of those volumes did you mark passages for his devotions?" he continued, drying his eyes. "Or did you—yes, I see it in your face. You bought a Bible before you came home, and ordered it sent to your address at the County Jail. Why, Rachel, are you crying? Come here, my gentle queen, and let me tell you all about it. I saw that the fellow was a pretty honest sort of a thief, and only needed to have his conscience enlightened a little; so I made his sentence

as light as possible, and I cannot very well shorten it. You and Nancy can make Sallie more comfortable than he could; and I'll add a few Patent-Office Reports and booksellers' catalogues to the jail collection. They will infuse a higher moral tone into the minds of the prisoners who know how to read, and counteract the effect of so much light literature. But what would you do with the man if I should let him out? They will not take him back at Swinton's, and he will not find a place anywhere else without recommendations. You will have him on your hands if you touch him, mark my words!"

He placed his slippered feet upon the mantel, and fell to reading a book he had brought home, as a hungry man would fall to eating.

I took my knitting. Somehow the clicking of the needles suggested Nancy Burris' strong, healthy nature. How our nee-

dles clicked as we sat and talked that very day! I went to her house to hear about Bill Bullitt and to see for myself if three black and three white checkers were missing from the board. And before the day had closed I found myself yoked with her to try to save two souls "from torment."

"What can two women do?" I asked myself despondingly, and like a flash there came into my mind a little paragraph I had seen somewhere about ciphers ranged on the right side of one. "Jesus is One; now add the ciphers, and read what you have written," said the writer.

"Sure enough. He is One, and Nancy and I are ciphers," I reflected. "Then where He leads and we follow we shall be a hundred strong!"

That thought brought strength and soothing to my weary brain. I put away my knitting and went to bed, and dropped asleep just like a baby.

Ciphers are of no consequence except they are beside the one, on the working side. The Lord's strength will be shown only when all his ciphers stand by him, on the working side. As a captain without soldiers, as a king without subjects, is Christ without his redeemed ones; they are ciphers but for him, and he is but One without them.

Saillie cried a little when I told her, the next day, that Clay could not come yet; but the poor little baby soon diverted her from her own trouble. She had not understood my directions, and it began to look as if I would have to administer my treatment myself. Nancy and I easily made him comfortable for the time being, and I tried again to instruct the feeble young mother in the use of the simple appliance for his relief: but after leaving her I felt more and more convinced that she would not succeed alone.

What should be done? I could not take up my abode there for three months; and as Nancy said she "didn't feel free to spile Jim's home by keeping her there," I knew it would go far to mar John's happiness if I took her home with me.

But after making it a subject of prayer all day I broached the matter "partridge-fashion"—as he said I always did—on this wise:

"John, can I have all the caramels I want for the next three months?"

"Why! are they gone already?" he asked with a startled face. "You will be asking if you can have false teeth next."

"No, they're not all gone," I answered in as steady tones as I could possibly maintain "but I want more, enough to last three months."

"And then, if I give you the money to buy caramels, you'll go and deny your-

self caramels altogether and send the money to buy caramels for the little heathen," said this experienced man and sharp lawyer.

"It 's heathen caramels I want, John," said I. The partridge does sometimes walk back to its nest under the eyes of the hunters. Now I had reached my nest to do or die. "I 'm afraid that Sallie, and the baby too, will die if they stay where they are, and the baby will not have proper care at the hospital. Do n't you remember how I had to give my whole mind and time to curing Robbie? This baby would have no such care at the hospital as I gave Robbie. I want to bring them here and keep them in the trunk-room. And then John?"—the partridge was growing bolder now and trying to turn the muzzle of the piece towards the hunter—"and then John, do n't you remember how a certain king used to send

messes from his table daily to three hundred princes? I think we might send up a daily mess from our table to one of the King's daughters, don't you, John?"

He cleared his throat and tried to say something quizzical about my agreeing not to make "a mess" of his table, and gave me a kiss that sounded like the Fourth of July, and went down town to his office.

I was surprised to see what a very superior place for trunks my attic proved to be, and what a cosey little bedroom the trunks had called their own. And so from that square where there were many aching hearts one was gently carried to that pleasant room.

A slender, sad-faced girl from the next room helped us get her ready for removal, a girl refined in speech and bearing, and showing a degree of dignity which won my admiration.

"Who was that, Sallie?" I asked, as soon as we had fairly started.

"That's Flora Hunter, ma'am, and she's as nice as she can be!" was the warm response.

"What is her trouble?" I asked. "Is she one of the girls who are afraid of being deserted?"

"No, ma'am, but most as bad. She has a gambling husband, and he's gone off and left her and her baby, and she's just about ready to give up. I've been coaxing her to write to her father; but she says, when she loses her mind she will write to him, and not before."

I resolved to lay that case before my neighbor, a lady who was very zealous in talking about charity, and always gave me to understand that it would not be safe for any one to show her an opportunity for doing good unless he really meant that she should do it.

"There is nothing more pathetic in the Bible," I reflected, "then the condition of things in that square. Surely she will only need a hint."

The pretty girl looked comfortable enough in her clean, soft bed in the old trunk-room, with her baby by her side gazing quietly with patient eyes at the flowers on the walls. She began to sit up in a few days. The "one mess" from our table was working a miracle upon the famished creature. The dark hollows under her eyes were shallowing and fading, and her lips were reddening again. Still she looked sad, unsatisfied, and as her strength came back a restlessness came with it.

Nancy noticed this. She came nearly every day "to knit a few rounds in good company," and finally she diagnosed the case and made a prescription for it.

"Sometimes they let a man out of jail

fer a couple of hours with a police along," she drew me into the bathroom one day to whisper, "and I believe if that man could git out long enough to give his name to that girl and the child, so 's her mind 'd be settled on that p'int oncet fer all, she 'd git well."

Sure enough! As her bodily strength increased her mind renewed its power to suffer. What wonder? Who of us would care for returning health, knowing that we might be deserted, with a nameless child to care for?

I insisted that Nancy should carry out her own idea as soon as possible, and she confided the management of the business part to Jim, who "laid off" half a day to attend to it, and so we had a wedding in the trunk-room.

There was no boisterous fun about this wedding; there were far more tears at this one than there was laughter at the other a

year or two before, when those two stood up for fun and "a fellow even said his prayer."

Nancy's pastor was called in to tie the knot and bless it, and he came promptly—a plain and good man, truly glad to help a jail-bird take the first right step.

Nancy and I had a discussion about telling Sallie about it beforehand, and she decided that the surprise would hurt her more than the excitement of thinking long about it. So we only told her that some old neighbors were coming to see her, and she tidied herself a little and sat down quietly to sew for the baby. I never saw her look so pretty in her careless days; only the sorrowful little droop at the corners of her mouth marred her loveliness.

While we waited for the party expected from the jail I visited the kitchen to see if a certain little "mess" of cake and cof-

fee promised to be in prime condition, and I found, skulking in at the back-door with a basket of grapes and bananas, my husband.

"Thought maybe they would improve the flavor of the caramels, though no one asked me to the wedding," he stammered, blushing like a rose.

"John, you are beautiful! Would you come up!" I exclaimed.

"Would I? Try me. If you 'll agree to hide me under the baby or somewhere," said he. And then, to atone for his apparent "benevolence prepense," he proceeded to say,

"After all my forbearance towards him in giving him only one year, he wants to put on the matrimonial ball and chain for life! I consider it my duty to warn him and tell him my experience."

I did not feel quite equal to replying to that dreadfully insincere speech, so it was

well that the party from the jail arrived just then, and that Nancy flew into the kitchen with her apron over her eyes.

"I can't tell her, Mrs. Baldwin; you must do it. I'm afeared I made a mistake that I did n't give her an idee of it." So I went up, my heart beating hard, telling the rest to wait below a moment.

I opened her door and said, "Sallie, there is to be a wedding here to-day. Can we have it in your room?"

"Why, certainly, Mrs. Baldwin," said she, smiling. "Is the cook being married?"

"No, my dear," said I, putting my arms around her, "it is a sweet and good woman who was married in fun a year or so ago, and I'm going to see her made happy and safe to-day."

For a moment she trembled and leaned on me, and then she turned and walked to the window and stood looking out.

I opened the door and beckoned to them to come up — Nancy, Jim, the policeman, Clay Cromwell, the minister, and the judge.

She turned and bowed without a word, then took her seat beside the baby; her face was like a stone. The minister and I made an attempt to talk about the weather for a minute, and then, noticing the distressed face of the man just from jail, I said, "If this is a wedding party I think somebody had better be getting wedded."

Then the minister asked them to stand up and take each other by the hand. Without stirring in her chair Sallie looked steadily at Clay.

"Clay Cromwell, was you forced to come here and marry me?"

"No, Sallie," said the man, meeting her gaze with honest eyes, "I come of my own wishes. I want all these here friends to

hear me say I love you and want you for my wife. Will you marry me and be a mother to my poor little boy?"

She stretched out both her arms to him, he sprang across the room and knelt beside her, and the minister began the marriage service. And so, clasped in each other's arms, with tears and kisses they took the vows so long delayed. We were all crying. Even the policeman wiped his eyes. The baby stirred during the prayer and the judge took it up and hushed it in his arms. And the bosom of the little dress was wet with tears when he laid it down.

And after all was over, while the mother showed the baby to the father who had never seen his child, my John put his handkerchief into his pocket with an air of resolution, and wanted to know if there was n't "some sort of a little 'mess' lying about down stairs that ought to come up

stairs?" and strode away for it straightway, with Nancy at his heels.

How he pressed refreshments upon that policeman! And how he filled his cup and plate, over and over, despite his protests! And how many questions he asked about certain late arrests! And how many arguments he provoked and fostered between him and Jim to while away the time!

And when the man did finally realize how long he had stayed, he was almost afraid to go back and report himself. So the poor young couple on the other side of the room had time for a long, quiet talk over the baby boy before the father was taken back to prison to serve his sentence out.

"I will see what can be done towards finding employment for you, Mr. Cromwell," said my husband, shaking hands with the prisoner at the door. "And, Mr.

Burris, I am very much pleased to have made your acquaintance."

And after Jim and Nancy went away he remarked that they were certainly people of uncommon sense and intelligence.

"Are they not very remarkable people in their class?" he persisted, as I made no response.

"No," said I, "I don't think they are. There are hundreds of just such men and women hurrying up and down our streets with dinner-pails and baskets, every night and morning. There are plenty of unset jewels in the world, and if you would see them flash you need but to come close to them."

"Well," said he obstinately, "I still think they are far above the average working people."

"I think," said I, "that if your memory is good, I can recall a little incident to you which will interest you."

"Do you remember that April when baby was so sick? Yes? Well, now try to recall that Sabbath morning when I told you about a man and woman who passed our house at four o'clock. The man was barefooted and muddy, and staggered along in front, cursing the woman. She followed, in a clean, bright gingham dress and bonnet; the tears were running over her white cheeks, and she could but just walk. You do remember? Well, they were Jim and Nancy Burris."

There was no response from John.

He was busy looking for the pieces of that theory.

CHAPTER V.

"BY A WAY THAT THEY KNEW NOT."

"WHEN I went back to Sallie, I found her nursing the baby. She looked up with a quiet smile and said, "I 'll never doubt no more that the Lord is good, for he has answered the main prayer I 've tried to make since you got me in the notion of praying. And now I 'm a-going to keep asking for a place for Clay and me and the baby, when he gets out. There must be some way for me and Clay to live together right, for Clay, he says he 's praying too. But" — after a moment's musing — "it would n't be the worst thing that could happen if we had to starve, if we could go to heaven together. We 've seen worse things a'ready than going there together for want of honest bread."

So I left her; she had "meat to eat" that was better than any I could give her.

The Judge's lamp was lighted, as usual, that night, but the book lay on the table. John was not inclined to read.

"I declare!" he broke out, after a half-hour's silence, "I never saw anything in life to equal the way that girl asked him if he came because he had to! She would n't have had him if he had said 'Yes,' and I liked her spirit. Never knew a man to live with a woman yet when he had been compelled to marry her. And then did you see how he began at the beginning, just like a gentleman? He had never asked her to marry him, so he deliberately popped the question then and there. And did n't he shoulder the baby like a hero? Asked her if she would 'be a mother to *his* poor little boy,' and he had never seen the child till that minute!

Well, I never saw anything finer in the court-room or anywhere!"

Then, his excitement having a little evaporated, his sense of humor began to assert itself.

"I say, Rachel, that was a short engagement, just till he could clip it across the room! I wish I had had the parson and the witnesses ready when I asked you to have me."

And then I left him, before he could go any deeper into that subject, and he took up his book.

We heard the baby crying in the night. It had been my custom to run whenever I heard it, for the cure was progressing nicely, and a single careless act would upset all that had been done and postpone the desired result yet other three months.

I usually flattered myself that John knew nothing about my nightly flights

along the halls. But this time he spoke. "Go and get the baby, Rachel, and let me have it: it looks just as Robbie did when he was in trouble, and I know I can get it to sleep."

I brought it to him. When miracles are to be wrought, I am ready to "fill the water-pots with water," or do anything else to help, and it looked very much as if somebody was working a miracle on John.

He took the little fellow in his arms, muttering something about women-folks' letting babies' feet freeze, cuddled it down by him, and neither of them stirred till morning.

After breakfast the next morning, as he folded up his napkin, he looked around the table. There were five children and ourselves and a vacant place, where our eldest sat for ten years, but which had been vacant ten years. I waited for him

to speak his thought, and wondered what it possibly could be.

"Seems to me, Rachel, when there are over a hundred pounds of caramels in the house, we might have them three times a day till they are gone: there certainly is room for them."

He waited long enough to assure himself that his little parable had "gone the whole length of my head," as he sometimes elegantly expressed it, and started off to the office.

He rang the changes on that name so often in those three months that I have ever since felt as if I ought to eat my caramels with salt; if, indeed it was right to eat them at all.

We agreed on our wedding-day that I was never to make a pun, and I never have—in his presence; and he was never to scold, and he never has—audibly. Vainly I pronounced the name with care,

"Crom-well," whenever I spoke of them; the very next minute he would break out with something like "The Caramels are coming, oh, ho! oh, ho!" "That was the straw that broke the Caramel's back." "The moon rose very caramelly to-night," and so on, and never stop till I assured him that with all his puns I loved him still.

I was not slow to take the hint about my boarder in solitary confinement, and at the dinner-table the sweet-faced girl sat in the vacant place with her baby tied in a big arm-chair close by. Her quick wit soon made her mistress of her fork and napkin, and now that she could hold her head up as an honest woman she was very pleasant company.

The three months sped away, the baby boy was cured, and we could almost see him grow.

Three months still remained of the prisoner's term in prison. Sallie went to see

him often. I visited him once a week, and so did Nancy, Jim, and Nancy's pastor too. And he had other visitors; the Holy Spirit and the angels know the way into prison cells. Unchallenged by sentinels or wardens, they took up their abode with him, and the man grew in grace.

"Did you say that the Caramels are both praying for an opening for work when he comes out?" my husband asked one morning, when but one month was left.

"Yes, why? Have you heard of something?" I asked again.

"No, I haven't, and I don't believe they will find anything," said he. "Nobody will employ a thief, not even as porter; and that girl's hands would not take kindly to a wash-board."

"I have great confidence in prayer," said I. "I was reading only the other day—"

"Never mind what you were reading,"

he exclaimed a little pettishly: "those things always sound like chips off the same block—head. I would like to have something come under my own observation, something that I could not doubt, and then I 'd pray all the rest of my life. Come, now, I 'll make this a test case. If an opening, a good opening, mind, presents itself for this man and this woman before his time is up, I will believe that there is really something in it."

I stole away alone to the mercy-seat for a little while to ask the Lord if anything could be too hard for Him.

Then I went to Sallie. "Sallie, are you still praying that you may be provided with work when your husband is free, and that he may have employment too?

"Yes, ma'am, and he is too," she answered promptly.

"And do you believe that it will be done for you?' I asked.

"Yes, ma'am, I do," she said, without any hesitation.

"I will 'stand aside' and see what He will do," I said to myself, as I hurried about to pack little luncheons and find little hats and strap little books for school.

All the forenoon I seemed to see unrolled before me like a panorama the instances in the Bible of God's willingness to prove his power in cases of honest doubt, and I kept saying over and over, "That was the same God to whom Sallie and Clay are praying." But through it all ran an undertone of belief that John's was not an honest doubt, and that even a miracle would avail nothing to him.

I never knew any one who insisted upon making his own conditions of surrender to accept them honorably and fully when they were granted. But perhaps this time John would take the step if those prayers were answered. Many a

time had my soul yearned over John, many a time had I tried to make my way over the abatis of wit and banter which I always encountered when I approached him on that side; and now he seemed to be interested for the first time in the result of somebody's prayers, interested enough to be just a trifle cross.

How strange that Nancy and Sallie should express themselves in almost the same words! Nancy did n't care how hardly life went with her, if only she and Jim could live in heaven together; and Sallie thought it would not be so very bad to starve, if that meant going to heaven with Clay. And I and John!

"I do n't know but I 'd as lief be lost if John is; I 'd fly lame without John," I said to myself, dropping tears into the basket of freshly-ironed clothes that had just come up stairs to be put away. I was getting them all mixed up, the boys'

shirts with the girls' skirts, and the socks mismated. My whole being was trying to weigh down heavily on the lever that was moving the Almighty arm, for whom? For these two poor homeless ones whose lives hung in the balance? Did any one ever succeed in loosening down a single blessing by itself?

No, they come like chain-shot, linked together; it is a good thing to be near some one who prays and join one's voice with his. The judge who pronounced the sentence on the prisoner at the bar had deliberately staked his own highest interests upon the prisoner's appeal to a higher court, and it was John for whom I craved the answer to the prisoner's prayer.

And there, by the basket of clothes, while I was trying to "sort" them over and keep them sorted, a wonderful thing came to me.

Three things in this world are always

wonderful, always unexpected, however natural or inevitable—death, the first sweet assurances of love returned, and answers to prayer. Why should not prayers be answered? The Hand that made the instrument can touch most distant keys in unison, and discord only comes when they refuse to sound under His fingers or try to sound themselves.

The postman brought a letter from John's twin cousins who always called themselves the "conies," because they were a "feeble folk." Their mother's lungs lasted only till they were born, and they survived the perils of babyhood mainly by virtue of their non-resistance of them. They themselves said that the old fellow with the scythe cut too far to the right or the left of them because they were so thin. And so they had lived together, a maiden and a bachelor, for forty years.

They kept a little fancy store in Iowa, both of them knitting and crocheting, learning and imparting to their customers the various broidery stitches and new fancies. They led a gentle, uneventful life that made small drain upon their strength. They scarcely needed even to talk to one another. Their minds were run in the same mould and both turned out together. Indeed, but for her quick eye for shades and combinations and his quicker eye for figures, one might have wondered that they had not both been boys or both been girls. They rarely wrote; it made them tired to write; but when they did we always felt like getting frames and hanging up their letters. "Samplers," John called them, for they were so quaintly written and the penmanship was so exquisite. And this was what they wrote from Iowa:

"DEAR COUSINS JOHN AND RACHEL:

"The lapse of time since last we had the pleasure of a letter from your pens convicts us of an unintentional negligence towards you. We trust that you will pardon our long silence when we state that, even for 'conies,' we are very feeble. Our lungs were never strong, and there are indications now that neither of us will again survive the wintry blasts of Iowa. Therefore we desire to put our house in order for the long-expected day, so strangely and so many times postponed.

"Our object in addressing you at this time is twofold: to say that we should be rejoiced to see your well-beloved faces once more on earth, if you can leave your home consistently, and to inquire if you can designate some proper person to whom we may intrust our little business.

"We have been long debating what to do. We have a very tender feeling for

the store, and cannot contemplate the thought of giving up to a careless person the stock and premises so neatly kept. And it would give us pain to close the doors as if we had already gone away.

"After a careful canvass of all those of our acquaintance to whom we might make such an offer, we feel moved to write to you to ask if you know any person suitable whom we might make our heir and successor."

Then came kindly messages for the children in trembling characters. The hand that wrote was "tired," whether her hand or his, I could not tell. One thing I knew; I knew who held the hand that wrote, and kept it steady till it wrote His message.

"John," said I, when he came home, "here is your fleece. Just wring it out for yourself."

He took the letter with a puzzled look

and uttered an exclamation of delight at sight of the familiar neat handwriting. I watched him as he read. I could see in his changing countenance how he progressed, and when he read the last paragraph he turned white and sat down.

"It is a miracle," said he; "there is no doubt of it."

"You are going to pray to Him now, John?" I whispered, creeping close to him. No answer.

"John, there is no other way to be saved!"

Still no response.

"O John, I love you so I could almost be lost with you, if it was n't for the children," I sobbed.

Then the old spirit of opposition rose within him. It is a dangerous thing to have once sharpened the points of an abatis against God's truth.

"I can't for the life of me remember

ever having done anything very bad," said this man, so upright and so lovable. It made me desperate.

"I wish you had!" I cried. "I wish you were a drunkard or a thief, for then your pride would not stand in the way. Jim and Clay were noble enough to accept Christ when he was offered to them. Your pride is a bigger sin than theirs both together. It is big enough to keep Christ out."

"Don't cry, little woman," said he, soothingly. "I will do it before long; I will, truly. But I have a crowded docket on hand just now, and cannot give the matter the attention it deserves. And, Rachel, I'm not 'lost' yet."

And there I had to leave him, just outside. John, the half of myself! with one hand I could touch him as we stood side by side, but the other could not reach him, though it circled the whole universe.

As far as the east is from the west, so far was John from me. Shall we ever come any nearer on that side?

It required something of an effort to recall the fact that, after all, the message was for Sallie. So I bathed my face with cooling things, in order not to bear the joyful tidings with too sorrowful a countenance, and took the letter to her.

Her breath came quickly when she read the last words, and she sprang to get her shawl and bonnet, to carry the news to Clay—then checked herself, and merely saying, "I was forgetting to thank Him," she went into the closet and shut the door.

"Did anybody ever do bad again after getting prayers answered?" she asked, when she came out.

"I am afraid they do, many times," I said, "but Christ is forgiving."

"It does n't look to me like I could be so mean," said she, putting on her wraps,

"and I'm going to warn Clay, and him and I will watch ourselves not to do it."

"Keep your eyes on Jesus, mydear child; that is the only safe way to look," said I, as I took my seat to nurse the baby and my heavy heart; and she flew down the stairs and out of the house, to tell her fellow-petitioner that the King had prepared a place for them.

I wrote straightway to the "conies," telling them the whole story, and they could not wait to write, but telegraphed their answer,

"Send her and the baby. Let him follow when free."

Again the little trunk-room held one trunk, while it was packed. Some of the clothing was marked with a "C," but most of it with a "B," for I felt as if a child was leaving me; and Sallie and the baby went to Iowa.

"Nancy," said I, when the train had

pulled out of the dépôt, "has the bond between you and me just gone off on the train? Or are we still joined in heart and hand for good work and for friendship?" I deserve no pity for the tears that filled my eyes immediately, for I had had experience before of her stalwart assurances of love.

I went out to Iowa a few weeks after Clay did, to see the "conies" in their "house among the rocks."

I found the gentle twins lying in easy-chairs, drawn close together, and the dimpled, crowing baby sitting on the two chair-arms between them, charming wisely. Sallie was hovering about the three, radiant with health and happiness; already she was the beloved daughter. Clay was in the store, besieged with customers, alert and courteous as ever. The business had increased since his coming, and larger orders must be sent for the spring trade

than ever before. I heard but one sigh from the twins: "If they had only come out long ago! for we must go so soon and leave them!" And so they prospered.

"It does beat all, ma'am!" said Nancy. when I told her about them, on my return. "There could n't be more than one fancy-store in the whole United States waiting to be give away; but 's long 's they was one, of course the Lord would know jest where it was; and it 's my opinion that the right ones got it."

I ventured to ask her, then, a question which had been often in my mind when we were separated, but which it always seemed impossible to utter in her presence. "Is there anything I could do to help you and Jim to better your fortunes? You have wisdom and discretion to do a great deal of good with a little spare money and a little more leisure."

Very quietly she raised her eyes.

"You said it as a sister might, ma'am; I think I could bring any trouble to you, ma'am; but Jim is on the right track now, and I would n't have him change. I 'd walk along the lowlands with him sooner than I 'd resk his falling. And the path that 's safe for Jim is good enough for me."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW JIM "J'INED."

JIM BURRIS' path was not laid out in the "lowlands" for its whole length. For half a dozen years he trudged along on the safer level, with Nancy by his side to cheer and steady his steps, and then the Providence in whom she trusted led him higher. He could not be called a man of superior ability, but he certainly acquired more skill in cutting and finishing goods than his fellow-workmen, by reason of his clearer brain and steadier hand. Therefore, when the foreman was dismissed for drunkenness, after several valuable orders had been lost or spoiled in consquence of it, it was not strange that Jim should be selected for promotion to his place.

The day of his succession was a good

one for that shop; for it was understood that the new boss, while he took no airs upon him and never "preached," would rather have no liquor brought into the shop.

And the men always felt more at ease if only their tin cans, with coffee in the top and bread and meat below, were set out on the bench at noon, for Nancy often came to fetch Jim's dinner hot, and they remembered how she looked when they brought wine and ale to cheer up Jim and Bill when they lay sick of small-pox.

The foreman's wage was carried home as regularly as the hand's had been for Nancy's keeping, and she turned it into comforts for the family, with frequent little luxuries for Jim.

"I never kin somehow feel like I've got Jim fair weaned yit," she said with a laugh as she showed me one shelf in her closet full of jellies and canned stuff for

his dinner-pail. "Seems like I have to cuddle him a little."

As time went on and Jim's higher path still seemed a safe one, her face began to look more youthful. Those weary years of worrying and watching had left their mark, but now she lost a certain wary look, as of one who listens for a sound outside of the homely noises near. And she no longer spoke of her family as "Jim and the children;" it was "us and the children." It was when he united with the church that he was taken into full partnership by the real head of the family.

I was away from home at that time. John and I had long been planning a sort of second wedding journey, to be taken when the children should be old enough to leave with safety. So now, having piloted the last one through the narrow channel beset with croup and whooping-cough and other kindred wreckers, I left them in my

mother's care and went with John to Europe. Lest this should be the "Baldwin Story," I will only say that the second wedding journey was pleasanter than the first, and on returning we found our little brood as thrifty as we left them all six months before.

The day after our return, while I was busy setting the trunks in order in the attic (Flora Hunter and her sewing-machine were in the trunk-room), I heard a well-known voice down stairs asking for me.

"Come right up here, Nancy, you dear old woman!" I cried, and she rushed up the stairs and fell upon my neck with the grasp of a bear.

"What is it, Nancy?" I exclaimed with my first good breath. "Sit right down here on the rag-bag and tell me what has happened. Oh, you can't put me off that way. It is n't simply seeing me."

"Jim's j'ined!" said she.

"Not joined the church!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, he has, j'ined the church, and I could n't hardly wait till you come home to tell you how it come round. You know Jim, he 's been religious fer a good while, but I could n't never git him to take the last step. He did git as fur as to read the Bible fer me when we had family prayers, but he would n't lead in prayer; fer he says, says Jim, 'Them children might hear me cuss yit, an' that would n't sound purty after praying,' says he. Fer he was afeared he might git to drinking ag'in, and the man that drinks is liable to cuss. And then he would n't jine fer fear he 'd bring disgrace on the church and his professions. 'Ef I do n't climb fur I can't fall fur,' says he.

"And so communion Sundays would come, and I 'd set still and Jim 'd go out. And the preacher, he kep' a-saying. 'This

is a type of the feast of heaven.' Now think of that, me a-setting at the feast and Jim a-walking out! Oh, you don't know how I've felt about it! Beg your pardon, Mrs. Baldwin, I didn't go to hurt you. I reely did fergit about the judge, and I wont do it no more."

"Go on, Nancy," I managed to say. "I may have to get used to that hurt."

She pressed my hand and continued,

"Well, as I was a-going to say, one Sunday come which a neighbor woman of mine, her husband j'ined the church, and she stood up by him to keep his heart up like, and then they took the bread and wine together, an' looked so happy I jest couldn't stand it. When I went home I says to Jim, says I, 'See here, Jim, this here foolishness is gone on long enough now! ef you do love the Lord you've got to come out on his side. You know's well I do ef you go back on him he'll go back

on you, and I can't stand the thoughts of it no longer. Now tell me jest what is a-standing in your way.'

"'I'm afeared I can't stand up to it,' says he.

"'Stand up how?' says I.

"'I'm afeared I'll git to drinking ag'in,' says he.

"All the way home I'd kep' a-praying fer the right answer to that there old excuse. I'd heared it so many times seems like it skinned my ears, fer every time it hurt me worse. And the answer was put in my mouth.

"'Jim,' says I, 'answer me two or three questions,' says I. 'Ef the Lord Jesus was on the earth now, do you believe he could keep out of saloons ef he thought they was bad places fer him and his disciples?' says I.

"'Of course,' says he; 'ask me a hard one.'

"'Do you believe he walked on the water?'

"'Yes,' says he. 'I kin see very plain that I 'm a-walking in at the door of a trap,' says he; 'but give us the questions.'

"'I wisht it was a door made of a single pearl,' says I, 'fer oncet in there you would n't want to go out,' says I. 'And now, do you believe that Peter walked on the water too, when Jesus held his hand?'

"'Yes,' said he, 'it 's that a'way in the Bible,' says he.

"'Well,' says I, 'that was water they could paddle a boat in and fish could live in; but I believe 'at Peter 'd 'a' had to git down and lick it ef he wanted a drink, his feet was that stiddy on it. And s'p'osing they 'd been part alcohol in it; He 'd 'a' kep' him stiddy and solid on that too.'

"Mrs. Baldwin, Jim looked like he seen some person standing behind me, and he could n't speak. And I says, says I, 'You

jest give Him your hand before the disciples, and say, "Lord, save; I perish!" like Peter did, and I believe He'll hold you up so's you could walk on liquor and never git in up to your mouth.

"'And now,' says I, 'what I want you to do is to go with me a Wednesday evening coming and set down your name to jine next Communion.'

"I didn't say it like I wanted to boss Jim, reely I didn't, and Jim, he never took it that a'way. But I heared a doctor oncet, a-laying down the law to a sick man that was contrairy-like, and I felt jest the way he talked. You see, I loved Jim so it made me mad to see him hang back so.

"Well, Wednesday evening come, and I had Jim's supper ready the minute he struck the house. After he'd eat it, I says, says I, 'Now you be a-cleaning up while I'm a-washing the dishes, and we'll be there early.'

"'I reckon I'll wait till next time,' says he, 'fer I'm tired to-night.'

"'You wont back out now, will you, Jim?' says I; 'now's the time and go's the word.'

"So he went up stairs to git cleaned up. I listened, but I could n't hear his feet tramping round ner the pitcher rattling in the bowl. So purty soon I followed him. He was setting in the rocking-cheer looking sleepy, er trying to, and had n't done one thing.

"'They a'n't but one clean shirt,' says he, quite hasty-like when he seen me, 'and I want that fer Sunday; you 've got enough to do without doing two washings a week,' says he.

"'I may not be agreeable to vote,' says I, 'but I kin do my own complaining; and ef that 's the last devil you 've got about you, I 'd enjoy drowning him violent down my washboard,' says I.

"Well, Jim laughed a minute, jest the way you 're a-laughing now, and then he put his arms around me, and he says, says Jim, 'Nancy, you 've right; the devil shall not keep me back;' and went to dressing.

"'Give me your shoes and I 'll shine them while you wash up,' says I. And so, between us both, Jim did git ready.

"And he got up of his own accord and asked the prayers of the members, and set his name down on the book fer next Communion. Mrs. Baldwin, I never had no great happiness come to me sudden-like afore that. I have had happiness, but it growed slow-like out of misery, and I was always lookin' fer it to wither down ag'in, like a soap-bubble turns back to suds. And now I felt like I reely had Jim fer keeps.

"The next morning he read the Bible, like he always did, and then he says, says Jim, 'Let us pray.' We all got down on our knees: he could n't think of nothing

to say but, 'Lord, save; I perish! Lord, save; I perish!' but that was the best prayer I ever heared; seems like I seen a hand reached down to hold him stiddy.

"And our oldest boy and Mary j'ined with Jim. So we 're all together now but David and the baby. But I think Davy holds back out of pure contrairiness, and the baby's name 'll pull her through, I reckon. Ef I could only see Davy stand up on the right side, I do believe I could enjoy this pain I git so often in my breast. And I 'm that thankful that I did n't run away from Jim that time when I came so near it, I 'm fair sick with joy when I think of it."

I looked at her with searching eyes; it meant that—the short, dry cough, the flushing cheeks, the shining eyes—and I had never thought of their meaning anything!

Now that the excitement of her walk

and run up stairs had somewhat subsided, I could see how she had changed in those six months. Perhaps the hand that "stiddied" Jim was helping this gleaner to work faster because her working day was almost over.

"Have you never been quite free from that cough that troubled you when I went away?" I asked.

"No, nothing seems to tetch it; it's going to take my life," she answered calmly. And we went down the attic stairs with slow and careful feet together. How could I give her up?

Ever since the Carmels were fairly established in their cosey fancy-store Nancy and I had been true yoke-fellows. Her shrewd common sense and practical knowledge of the necessities of the unfortunate girls in the block where we found Sallie, and the best avenues of approach to them, were wonderful. Many a woman reared

in luxury longs to help her less favored sisters, but is kept back by a sense of her own ignorance, as well as an exaggerated idea of the difference between her station and theirs and a real delicacy about intruding upon them. These had been some of the sources of my own weakness and inefficiency in such work, and I felt that I had discovered one skilled to coin my good intentions into currency when I found Nancy.

Those seven years of loving, systematic work with her to lead me, to hold me back, to make paths straight and open doors, were the happiest years of my life; and now this faithful yoke-fellow was falling by my side!

Four days after our talk in the attic I went around to the little house in the back street. My pony knew the way, and always turned his head in that direction as if to say, "is it to Nancy's this time?"

My heart was full of longing to begin my work again after so long an absence. Nancy was the best of talkers, but her pen was slow and stiff, so her letters had been few and brief and almost bare of news. There were many questions to be asked about our little parish, and I threw the pony's rein over the post and hastened up the steps to the old front-door. My knock was not answered, so I opened the door and went in, through the house, up stairs, in search of Nancy.

How shall I tell it? She lay propped up with pillows, breathing short and hard, every breath a stab. There was a piercing wind on Monday; she caught cold while hanging out the wash, and her lungs were on fire.

The little Rachel hung about the bed, kissing the hard, thin hands with baby lips, leaning her curly head against the pillows, dimly conscious that there was

trouble, though too young to comprehend it. Mary had gone to the shop to tell her father what the doctor said about the case, and the boys were away at school.

The mother's eyes filled when she looked at Rachel.

"The others is pretty—well growed," she panted; "but this—little lamb."

Instantly the dimpled hands stole up to wipe away the tears, and the blue eyes looked wistfully from Nancy to me.

"Mamma 's kying," she said, and ran to get her dollie and make it dance for mamma on the bed. Mamma smiled and nodded, and Rachel put away her dollie, satisfied that mamma's clouds were chased away.

The shining, wide eyes followed her. "I reckin the Lord knowed—what he was—about when he—sent that baby—fer me to leave—so soon," said she. Then, trying to lift her head to give an emphasis to the

words, she added, "He don't make—no mistakes."

"The baby will have a work to do," said I faintly. It had always seemed to me as if I could lay hold of something and defy death to take me away from my children. I could imagine myself submissive to almost anything else, but to die and leave young children! The mother's clear eyes read my face.

"He don't make—no mistakes," she repeated.

"Your faith and trust are greater than mine," I faltered, with fast falling tears.

"Been fed—all night—on them," she whispered. "Rachel 'll be—Jim's anchor."

I cannot tell it all; the pen must be inspired that portrays the day and night in which a Christian wife and mother numbers her last hours on earth. Oh, precious hours! A little time to whisper words of encouragement to the young Christians,

John and Mary, to beg of David to prepare to follow her, to leave sweet messages to be taught to little Rachel, to comfort the broken-hearted man who would hardly know how to breathe when this strong heart was still. How the soul strains every nerve to put the last strokes to its work in the last hours! Even the Saviour labored day and night just at the last, crowded the moments full, as if impatient of the slow motions of his human tongue and the dull ears of his disciples.

Just at daybreak she cried out, "Lift me up; my Lord is ready!"

And then the father and his children clung together in their loneliness, while little Rachel, wakened by the mother's voice, came pattering in on soft, bare feet, and, for the first time in her life, found no smile of welcome on her mother's face.

CHAPTER VII.

"LORD, SAVE; I PERISH!"

THE first days are not the hardest. A physical weariness benumbs the whole being like an anæsthetic; the sharpest pangs are soon sheathed in exhaustion. And then there is a mocking sense of nearness, as if we might stretch out a hand in the darkness and grasp again the one we just let go—it cannot be too far away so soon! But as the days go on the chair is empty still, the best-loved voice has never spoken once since that last whisper, and the busy world jostles the mourner if his footsteps lag to listen and remember. Then comes the anguish of bereavement! And then sometimes the past comes back with whips and makes us cower and cry for pardon from the one we mourn. This was one thing I dreaded for Jim Burris.

John and I were sitting together and talking about him one evening about two weeks after Nancy went away, remarking how devoted he was to her in her sickness, and how terrible a blow her death seemed to be to him, and I said that I could hardly realize that they were the same people who passed our house that early Sabbath morning when he was staggering and cursing and she was feebly following in tears.

"I think, Rachel," said my husband, "if it had been you and I, that little experience would be hurting me just about now."

Before I could reply the door-bell rang. John answered it himself, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Rachel, come here!"

Jim Burris came reeling in, with little Rachel sleeping in his arms. I sprang to take the child when I saw them, while John grasped the father's arm and led him to the library.

"I a'n't drunk, Judge Baldwin; I ha'n't tetched it yit, but I 'm afeared I 'll have to."

And the man sank down in a chair, looking as if he was about to faint.

"Why, Burris, you would n't throw away all that you 've gained in all these years! Think of your wife," said John, sitting down close by him. He turned wild, haggard eyes towards the judge, and his lips quivered.

"I would n't want it ef I could quit thinking about her. It 's because I do think, and I 'm afeared I 've got to drink myself blind drunk so 's I 'll fergit her jest once, er I 'll go crazy!"

"You had better lose your mind, Burris; you 'll get to your wife in glory safe and sound, even if your mind does get unbalanced for a while down here."

So spoke the lawyer.

"It 'll kill me to think sech thoughts much longer," sobbed the man.

"Die sober then, my friend; it will be a safer way to die," was the prompt reply. And then, drawing his chair still closer, he said, very gently,

"Tell us what thoughts you have. Maybe we can walk up to your ghosts and lay them for you."

"Well, I'll try," he answered, after a moment's pause to recover his voice.

"Wait a minute," I interrupted; "let me lay Rachel down and get something that will warm and strengthen you before you begin."

John held out his long arms and I laid the pretty little thing on his broad breast. She was deep asleep; her cheeks were pink, and her soft curls were moist with the dews of healthy childhood's slumber. The father turned to look at her with quieter eyes.

"I took her out o' bed an' dressed her to keep me in the middle of the road over

here. Seemed like I could n't get Nancy's baby through a saloon door."

He smoothed the little stockings on the short, plump limbs. "Mary kin darn as good as her mother," said he, pointing to the neatly filled-in knees.

"You will take a great deal of comfort in your children," John was saying as I came back with a tumbler of hot milk and a plate of bread and cheese.

"Now eat and drink," said I. "This hot milk will stimulate and refresh you, and then tell us all about it."

"I do believe that hot milk done me good!" said he, with genuine surprise after a few minutes, during which we admired the baby, praised Mary's neat work, and expressed our expectation that she would make a comfortable home for her father and brothers and be a mother to little Rachel.

"I do n't feel that craving I had when

I come here," he resumed, still surprised.

And I mentally resolved to go the next morning and advise Mary to provide hot milk and some simple treat whenever this restless spirit came upon her father. A little while we watched the glowing coals and talked of various matters. Jim was growing cheerful. Should we let him go home as he came, with a burden on his mind unspoken? Was not John right about there being ghosts to lay? I tried to think what Nancy would have done, she was so discreet, yet so direct and soldierly; and I remembered how she almost collared him to make him join the church when he was wavering. That decided the matter, and I ventured to say a word.

"You will leave those ghosts with Judge Baldwin and me? The baby will be enough for you to carry home."

He raised his head and looked at me.

"Kin you read minds like Nancy could?" he asked abruptly.

"I loved her well enough to want to help her husband," said I.

"Well, now, I was jest a-wondering ef I had n't better go home with the same load I come with, but I reckon I 'd best tell it, fer it 'll git me ag'in ef I carry it back. You do n't know how bad I 've been to Nancy. I feel like I 'd orter be took up and serve my time. I left her onct fer three days an' nights, and we was n't long married.

"You see, I 'd been drinking off an' on, and Nancy, she was that good to me it made me feel too mean. So I says to myself, says I, 'I 'll take one good spree where she can't be bothered of me nor be bothering of me.' So I stayed in an old empty shop-room with my jug and tried to make it go. But I could n't seem to git drunk enough to fergit Nancy, and the third

night I walked by home to see ef she had a light, er ef smoke was coming out of the chimbley. And I seen Nancy setting by the winder, leaning ag'in the glass with her eyes shet. She was so white I thought fer a minute she was dead from watching and grieving, and I went in the gate and stepped up clost to the winder. The lamp was setting on the table by her, and I seen the pulse a-beating in her neck, so I knowed she was asleep. So I kissed the glass over her forehead, and went back to sober up a little furder."

Here he broke down, and sobbed a while as if his heart would break, and John and I were crying too.

"The thing that hurt me worst," said he, when he could speak again, "is that she never oncet faulted me fer it. She set and talked so pleasant, and looked so thin and white. Oh, I can't never forgive myself fer it!"

"She told me all about that long ago," said I. "She packed her trunk and started to call a porter to take it to the dépôt, intending to leave you; but changed her mind because she had married you 'for better or for worse,' and she would not run away from 'worse.'"

"Did she say that?" he asked.

"She did, over and over," I resumed, "and only the week before she left us she spoke of it, and said she was 'fair sick with joy' whenever she thought of what she came near doing. So you see she forgave it years ago, and that ghost need n't trouble you any more."

"But that h a'n't all, Mrs. Baldwin; they was a worse thing than that. The last spree I had, I give her the slip, and she run after me all night, poor thing! She was n't fit hardly to walk, had orter been at home, with me a-waiting on her. When I come to, I was laying out on a side-

walk, all over mud, an' purty near naked, an' Nancy was workin' with me, bathin' my face and cryin'. Now, Mrs. Baldwin, you know I loved Nancy—kin you tell me how it was I come to cuss my wife when I was full of liquor? The first time, she throwed up her hands and drawed her breath like it hurt her; an' I laughed, and cussed her ag'in, to see what she'd do. An' I cussed her all the way home, and she never spoke a word. I told her I'd learn her not to interfere with me! But that day, when she laid like death and the doctor even gave up hope, an' the little white box laid on the front-room table, and I was afeared they'd be a long one there next day—I tell you I learned a lesson then, an' h a'n't never teched a drop sence! Seems like I've done all a man could to make up fer it, but she'd 'a' been a stronger woman ef I had n't worried her life out them first

years. I been a-thinking, to-day, that ef I do git to hell I hope to mercy there 'll be fire there to take up my attention burning me, and keep me from thinking of them times. I s'pose you 'll say Nancy's forgive that too, though; but you two 'll despise me, now an' now on."

Here John broke in. "Tell us something we do n't know now, Burris," said he, drying his eyes and smiling. "My wife saw you and your wife that morning; we 've known it all the time, and only think the more of you for telling it."

"You 've knowed that—" he began.

"Now that ghost may go away for ever," I said quickly. "Nancy told me that she was glad and thankful for that night, for it gave you back to her 'to keep.'"

'I 'm afeared it 's going to be mighty hard to walk straight without Nancy," he said despondingly, after a long silence.

"What was it you said in your first

prayer with her and the children?" I asked.

"Lord, save; I perish!" he cried, and threw himself down on his knees by John's chair. "Lord, save; I perish! Nancy's gone, and I can't walk alone! Hold my hand and keep it solid under me, my Lord! Keep me safe, an' give my love to Nancy, for Christ's sake. Amen!"

Springing to his feet, he seized and wrung our hands. "Give me my baby. I h a'n't afeared to go home now!"

We put the shawl about her; she smiled and murmured in her sleep as John laid her in her father's arms.

"I do believe she dreams about her mother all night," he whispered, as he gathered up the little bundled thing.

"You are father and mother both now, and Nancy will expect you to bring all the children to her," I said in parting at the door.

"I 'll do my level best," said he. "David's give me his word that he 'll j'ine next time, and John and Mary is their mother's children; but you must pray for us!"

We listened to the steady manly steps that rang upon the pavement as far as we could hear them, then turned and walked together down the hall to the library fire, and looked into each other's eyes. The rug lay tumbled as Jim "scuffed" it when he went down on his knees. The chairs stood close together still.

"Sweetheart, I should want to send my love to you." He tried to say it lightly, but his eyes were swimming.

"You need the same Saviour that is helping Jim," I whispered.

"Tell me what to say, and I 'll say it now, Rachel."

We knelt together. "Peter's prayer saved Jim; try that, John."

"There is nothing 'too hard' for the Lord," I lay thinking, hours after, while John slept peacefully. "He can keep Jim from sinking, can make Nancy die contented and happy—can rescue Clay and Sallie and prosper them, and now, John!"

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